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ABSTRACT

This paper shares with higher education institutions what Central Missouri State University's Document Center is like and what it took to develop the Document Center prior to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Board of Examiners team visit. Each section of the paper addresses a unique component that contributes directly to the success of the Document Center. The sections focus on the NCATE Document Center coordinator; the Document Center room; university support; developing quality documents for the Center; collecting documents; deadlines for submitting documentation; user-friendly systems; food, refreshments, image, and parking spaces; and displays. The paper concludes that many individuals at any institution can plan and arrange a Document Center, though it takes considerable time, energy, and support. (SM)

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Document Center for NCATE Accreditation: Securing and Organizing Documentation

by

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Overview:

"A key to efficient preparation for a visit is the routine maintenance of documents that describe the activities of the unit."

"The section of exhibits lists specific types of documentation that should be maintained on a regular basis and made available to teams during the on-site review."

"Some institutions retain the exhibits set up for the initial visit as a permanent record base from which old information is systematically removed and new information added."

"Because teams do not have time to search for documents in the offices of individual faculty members, files that are not placed in the exhibit room should be available at a readily accessible location during the visit."

(Source: NCATE Handbook for Continuing Accreditation Visits, 1996)

NCATE has given institutions some limited insight in the preceding statements as to what the Board of Examiners (BOE) team expects to see during a visit for accreditation in an Exhibit Room (Document Center). Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, Missouri took that information and developed a plan to design a Document Center for its NCATE continuing accreditation visit. That plan was put into place and the CMSU NCATE Document Center was developed. The NCATE BOE team worked in the center during the Spring of 1997. Central Missouri State University achieved its on-going accreditation for initial and advanced programs in October, 1997.

The purpose of this paper is to share with other higher education Institutions what Central Missouri State University's Document Center was like and what it took to develop that Document Center prior to the NCATE BOE team's visit. Each section of the paper addresses a unique component that contributed directly to the success of the Document Center.

NCATE Document Center Coordinator:

This person must be an individual who knows the NCATE process and understands the categories and standards. The individual must also know and understand every aspect of the Unit's programs at the initial and advanced levels. Once you find a few people on your campus who meet these criteria you must decide which person has excellent organizational skills, is task oriented, is an excellent editor, detail oriented, views the process as business and image related, is able to set deadlines and follow through on them, has obsessive compulsive behavior, and is not afraid to acknowledge who is not completing their portion of the work requested for the center. The person should not be a graduate student, secretary, junior faculty member or not have achieved tenure at the institution. The Document Center Coordinator has the decision making power as to which documents become part of the Document Center.

Room:

The room where the Document Center is housed should be dedicated as the NCATE room for the Unit. The room should be large enough to house all documents, have multiple padded chairs with arm rests that are very comfortable, be able to accommodate at least 15 people for general meetings, and allow for NCATE BOE members to feel like they are at home. Tables, five or more, should have large workspace tops to permit individuals to layout multiple documents for ease in viewing. Also, the room needs to have multiple computers with internet and e-mail access, a printer, a telephone, a television/vcr, a copy machine (rent the machine for the visit), a scanner, screens, overheads, chalkboards, multiple electrical outlets, extension cords, chalk, erasers, pens/pencils, markers, a lot of paper, and disks. Most especially, the room must be well illuminated and ventilated. The whole Document Center must be quiet and secure in order to protect the investments of the institution. BOE members should be issued keys to the facility and all filing cabinets, and be given all computer codes.

University Support:

The NCATE Document Center Coordinator will need at least two secretaries to help with filing and data input. These people must be trustworthy and task oriented. The positions need not be filled on a full-time basis and it would be best to have mature graduate students rather than undergraduate work study students performing the tasks.

The second component of support is obviously funding. Your Unit Head must provide enough funding to complete all tasks on time and equip the Document Center so that work is never at a stoppage point. The Unit Head must work closely witn the Document Center Coordinator.

Developing Quality Documents for the Center:

The process of developing quality documents to clearly demonstrate that the unit is meeting the standards is a complicated. ongoing task. Extensive professional dialogue and professional work will be needed. It seems to generally involve the following steps:

1. Selection by the NCATE Coordinator of individuals or groups to ensure the unit is performing effectively on each standard and primary themes across the standards, such as conceptual frameworks, performance assessment, diversity, and technology.

These individuals or groups need to have responsibility for or potential to shape the areas in the teacher education program reflected by the standards and the primary themes. Individuals such as the coordinator of field experiences may be assigned to standards related to field experience or groups may be assigned to standards where several persons share the responsibility, i.e. development and implementation of conceptual frameworks. They need to be given the responsibility and support for making sure the unit continues to be strong over time on their standards or themes. Once assigned they need to be oriented, given any necessary professional development, and given ongoing support.

2. Preliminary gathering of existing documentation by those individuals or groups with assistance from the NCATE Coordinator.

These individuals and groups need to begin their work with the NCATE coordinator by sharing knowledge of the program from across their varied areas of responsibility and gathering existing documentation. They also should be in communication with the Document Center editor by this time, seeking suggestions and tips for alignment with the needs of the Documents Center.

3. Assessment by those individuals or groups with assistance from the NCATE Coordinator of whether or not those documents demonstrate that the standard(s) have been met.

Once the individuals and groups are fully informed about the standard(s) and the program and have collected existing documents, they must rigorously ask themselves if the documents are sufficient to clearly demonstrate that the standard has been met. This assessment process must be extremely rigorous

4. Proposing, securing approval for, and implementing program enhancements or changes by the NCATE Coordinator and developing documentation to demonstrate these changes/enhancements.

Once these individuals/groups have completed the initial assessment, they then need to ensure that program enhancements or changes are made to bring the program up to standard. They may be able to do this themselves since they will be working in their area(s) of responsibility. However at times, they will need to seek assistance of others or delegate tasks to other individuals or groups.

5. Reassessment by those individuals or groups with assistance from the NCATE Coordinator of whether or not documents demonstrate that the standard(s) have been met.

As changes are made and additional documentation emerges, these individuals or groups need to reassess the quality of the documentation. They also need to make sure the documentation is clear and directly aligned with the standards.

6. Review by the Document Center Coordinator as to whether or not

documents demonstrate that the standard(s) have been met.

At this time, the Document Center Coordinator needs to carefully review the documents to be sure they match the center's purposes. The editor may approve the documents and begin the process of incorporating them into the center or the editor may inform the individual/groups that changes in the documentation need to be made.

8. Review by the NCATE consultant as to whether or not documents demonstrate that the standard(s) have been met.

An external consultant should come to the campus at least two times before the continuing accreditation review to review preparation with the unit. One visit should be eighteen months before the continuing accreditation visit to review preparation with the unit. The central focus of this visit would be an extremely rigorous review of the quality of documentation and the Document Center. This review should result in recommendations for the individuals/groups, document center coordinator, the NCATE coordinator, and the dean.

Collection of Documents:

The types of documents necessary for an NCATE BOE review are outlined by NCATE in its publication *Handbook for Continuing Accreditation Visits* (1996). The problem for all institutions is how can all of those items be retrieved in a timely fashion so that the Document Center Coordinator can place them on file in the Document Center. The NCATE Coordinator, not to be confused with the Document Center Coordinator should organize teams of individuals from the Unit who are responsible for various standards in either the initial or advanced reviews. Timelines and deadlines for when the documents will need to be submitted to the Document Center Coordinator must be coordinated between the Document Center Coordinator, the NCATE Coordinator and the Unit Head.
The Document Center Coordinator must review all documents, decide if documents need to be reworked, decide which documents support specific NCATE Standards and lastly decide what documents are needed in order to justify a specific standard fully. The NCATE Document Center Coordinator must decide which documents are to be duplicated and placed in files across multiple categories, standards, and programs.

Deadlines:

The system only works if there are deadlines that all individuals who are required to submit documentation must follow without exception. The Document Center Coordinator does not and should not have the power to enforce deadlines. The enforcement of deadlines must be assumed by the Unit Head who is advised by the Document Center Coordinator if there are any shortcomings or problems with the process. The Document Center Coordinator sets all deadlines and conducts meetings with individuals who submit documents if the Coordinator deams it necessary.

User Friendly System:

Whatever is to be housed in the Document Center must be organized into a user friendly system. The system should be divided into an Initial Programs and an Advanced Programs set of files. It makes a lot of sense to place documents in the order that NCATE Standards are listed. Various colored folders should be used with specific labels for each category. Each file should have a summary sheet (see appendix) which would summarize for the reader what the document is about. Each Standard should have a summary sheet (see appendix) for the full set of files per standard, and likewise each category should have a summary sheet for the full category. All of the summary sheets should be part of the filed documents. All summary sheets should be very explicit about the document and direct an examiner where to find a document (display, tape, disk, large three-ring binder, portfolio, student work) in the Document Center if it is not part of the file. Also, all summaries should be duplicated and bound so that the BOE team can read the summaries prior to viewing any individual documents if they choose to do so. Also, an index (see appendix) must be devised for all documents that exist in the Document Center. This should include the NCATE Category and Standard number along with a document title and a file number. The index and the summaries should also be on disk.

This system allows a BOE team member the option to read each individual document, read summaries, use hard copies, or view a computer screen for summaries and the index. We at CMSU do not believe that placing all documents into an electronic format at this time is advisable for the

purposes of accreditation.

Food, Refreshments, Image and a Parking Space:

Each Documents Center should have food catered in for the BOE team. This could include breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. We do suggest that if at all possible breakfast and dinner should be away from the Document Center. Please make sure that there is enough iced water (Bottled), coffee, pop, juice or tea available at all times in the Document Center. We also suggest that the Document Center be relatively close to clean restrooms. Remember that the BOE visit is about the review of the insititution's image whether that be educational programs or the hallways and room of the buildings where those programs transpire. The BOE team should be given a reserved parking space that is as close to the Document Center as possible.

Displays:

It was our belief that the BOE team might like to view a number of components of our programs prior to looking at the documents. We designed a number of display tables that reflected such areas as recruitment, multiculturalism, faculty research, student research, and technology. These tables were not part of the Document Center in a formal sense but only served to invite our guests to view what we are all about. We were concerned about presenting a positive image and believed that the display tables would render a good first impression upon the team. We wanted the BOE team to feel as welcomed to CMSU as possible.

Conclusion:

We believe that many individuals at any institution can plan and arrange a Documents Center. We also believe that it takes a lot of time, energy, support, and an excellent NCATE Document Center Coordinator to fully organize a user friendly Document Center for a BOE team. Document Centers are not and should not be designed and organized in the month prior to the BOE team's visit. The Document Center is a viable part of the institution as it is constantly being updated and revised.